

PLAYING THE MARKET

CONFESSIONS OF A VINTAGE GEAR WHORE

BY CURLY MAPLE

AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

This column is usually consumed with the virtues of pristine vintage instruments. Once in a while, though, it's nice to sing the praises of a guitar to which time—and its various owners—has been less than gentle.

Consider this battered-within-an-inch-of-its-life 1954 (or 1955) Les Paul Standard. The back of its neck and headstock were stripped, and the serial number was long ago sanded out of existence, making it impossible to determine if this guitar still sports its original neck. The Brazilian rosewood fretboard, which has period-correct inlays, appears to be original. However, the Grover tuners aren't stock, and multiple screw holes reveal that this instrument has been fitted with numerous aftermarket machines.

Once an all-gold beauty (some early Les Paul gold-tops had backs and sides finished in the metallic hue), this guitar has had virtually all of its paint removed. The top was sanded to determine if the guitar had a center seam and could be converted to the specifications of a more highly sought-after 1957-'60 flame-top Les Paul Standard. Finding no seam, he decided to distress the rest of the top to simulate a rather vicious degree of arm wear.

Despite these alterations, the Les Paul still sports its original "soapbar" P-90 pickups. Combined with the many sonic charms of the 50-year-old mahogany body, these hot single-coils produce a brash and growling tone that few guitars can match. And whether the neck is original or not, it plays like a dream.

In pristine condition, this ax would fetch between \$8,500 and \$10,000, but in this condition it commands a paltry \$3,500—a compelling argument for adopting a battered instrument.

Cool eBay sighting of the month:

Item #2509689007
A killer Italian-made Binson Echorec tape delay unit similar to those used by Jeff Beck

and Jimmy Page in the Yardbirds. With five days to go, this baby was already inching over the \$400 mark.

SOUNDCHECK TESTING 1...2...3...

The Untouchable

Matchless DC-30 combo. BY ERIC KIRKLAND

The Matchless sound is among the few amp tones that is instantly recognizable, possessing the authority of a vintage Hiwatt and the chime of an AC-30. Now under new leadership, Matchless is kicking out some of its best work yet, with amplifiers that exhibit the company's long-standing dedication to tone.

Our new ruggedly built, two-channel DC-30 combo featured a crimson vinyl exterior and rust-colored grille cloth set off by gold piping. This completely hand-wired beauty derives its 30 watts of Class A power and world-class tone from four EL-84 power tubes, three 12AX7s and a single EF86 preamp tube. Power rectification comes from either two 5V4G rectifier tubes or a single 5AR4. I tested the combo with the latter.

In addition to an illuminated nameplate and front panel, the DC-30 has point-to-point wiring, high- and low-gain inputs for each channel, power and standby switches and a push/pull master. Leaving the master knob pushed in renders it inactive and removes it from the circuit, while pulling it out makes the master active for both channels.

The back panel's complement of controls and jacks includes a switched and unswitched power receptacle, a normal/reverse speaker phase switch, two speaker outs, a hi/low power switch and an impedance selector. Each channel also has its own


effects loop, which is accessed through a tip-ring-sleeve (TRS) 1/4-inch jack—a TRS Y-cord is required for typical loop operation. The two Celestion speakers—a G12M Greenback (25 watts) and a G12H (30 watts)—are perfectly married to this amp's tone. When played clean, they offer the fat punch of 80-watt Celestions. When driven, they deliver gorgeous grind and articulation.

Channel one is lower in potential gain and creates a robust touch-sensitive clean tone. Compared to older Matchless amps, this channel is quicker and boasts a warm

blackface vibe. Its highly interactive controls include volume, bass and treble. Channel two creates glorious medium-gain crunch and utilizes a cut knob and a unique six-position tone sweep, as well as its own volume control. Rotating this tone sweep clockwise fattens the tone, and every position was useable; I really couldn't pick a favorite. The cut knob reduces highs and is useful for maintaining balance as the amp is opened up.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

It should be obvious to any reader by now: the Matchless DC-30 is incapable of producing a bad sound, regardless of guitar or setting. As incredible as the original Matchless amps were, I like this one even more. 



list price \$3,565.00

manufacturer Matchless Amplifiers, 1933 Pontius Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90025; (310) 444-1922; matchlessamplifiers.com

the binson
NEW, HIP AND UNDER THE RADAR

HEAVY METAL

Musician Sound Design
SM-1 Silver Machine wah

It's certainly not in humanity's best interest to reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes. But suffice to say that while the Germans are legendary for their abilities to consume prodigious quantities of beer and build extremely efficient highways, they are hardly ever described as "funky" or "souful."

So it was with a degree of skepticism that I approached the German-made SM-1 Silver Machine wah (\$299). Sure, this stainless-steel tank of a device, is flawlessly crafted,

looks like a monster truck gas pedal and weighs in at almost four pounds. Its thick chassis and hefty rocker pedal could probably withstand being dropped onto the Autobahn at rush hour. But bulletproof construction and precise engineering can't save you if your wah pedal sounds like cold steel.

To my delight, the Silver Machine's tone is liquid, subtle and vocal, yet edgy enough to cut through a mix. Added versatility is provided by two rotary switches: Earth, which lets you choose three frequency ranges for the pedal's sweep; and "Quake," which alters the fil-

ter's "Q," or bandwidth. A two-way switch flips the pedal between Classic mode, in which the Silver Machine acts like a standard wah, and Modern, in which a desired amount of dry signal (the level of which can be set via a small pot inside the pedal chassis) can be mixed with the wah for different intensities of flavor. An on/off footswitch rounds out the complement of controls, but players won't find themselves using it much, as the "Automagic" sensor activates the effect instantly when a foot is placed upon the rocker pedal. How cool is that! —Tom Beaujour



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